

PSC DECIDES 314 AREA CODE ISSUE

Jefferson City (July 22, 1998)---The Missouri Public Service Commission has determined that a **geographic split and a new area code** should be used to alleviate the exhaustion of available telephone numbers in the current 314 area code. Exhaustion is due to occur in the fourth quarter of 1999.

At the same time, the Commission has opened a new case to evaluate and implement number conservation measures designed to lengthen the time before number exhaustion occurs again in the St. Louis area.

“The Commission has placed this case on an expedited schedule in order that we may quickly evaluate and then implement various number conservation measures to extend the life of these two area codes,” stated Commission Chair Sheila Lumpe.

Regarding a geographic split for the current 314 area code, the Commission reached its decision based upon the recommendations of the Office of the Public Counsel (OPC) and those citizens who attended local public hearings and/or wrote letters on the issue. The Commission found that evidence concerning **customer impacts clearly and unequivocally tipped the scale in favor of a geographic split over an overlay**. An overlay had been recommended by several parties in this case.

At local public hearings, customers stated it would be simpler and more convenient to continue to dial seven digits for local calling within their own area code than to dial ten digits on every call within both area codes. The Commission noted in its decision: “The customers have made their assessment of these issues clear on the record before the Commission, and the Commission therefore finds that, from the standpoint of customer impacts, a geographic split is preferable to an all services overlay at this time.”

In its decision, the Commission has determined that the St. Louis principal zone as well as the exchanges of Spanish Lake, Florissant, Hazelwood, Bridgeton, Ferguson, Riverview, Overland, Creve Coeur, Ladue, Webster Groves, Kirkwood, Sappington, Mehlville and Oakville will retain the 314 area code as proposed by the Office of the Public Counsel. A new, yet to be determined, area code will be issued for all of the other exchanges currently in the 314 area code (such as St. Charles, Wentzville, Jonesburg, Washington, Union, DeSoto and Festus). The new area code number assignment will be made by Lockheed Martin, administrator of the North American Numbering Plan.

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A proposed three-way geographic split was rejected by the Commission because it would result in such small area codes that the benefits of a geographic split would be significantly reduced.

It is important to note that even with a geographic split, there will be some customers dialing ten digits to complete a local call (area code + the seven digit telephone number of the called party). For example, subscribing customers of the Metropolitan Calling Plan (MCA) will have to dial ten digits to call to another exchange in the MCA plan if that exchange is in a different area code. That call is still a local call. If the customer can complete the call using the ten digit number without using a 1 in front of the number, that call is still a local call even though it may be in a different area code.

The primary advantage with a geographic split is that it **retains seven digit local calling**, it **retains a geographic identity** associated with the unique area code, and **it minimizes or eliminates claims of competitive disadvantage associated with overlays.**

A technical committee formed in 1995 to evaluate area codes issues in Missouri has been ordered by the Commission to develop an implementation schedule for the conversion to the new area code for affected customers. That schedule is to include a public education process for the new area code, as well as dates when the permissive dialing period will begin and when mandatory dialing will occur. During the permissive dialing period, a customer can begin using the new area code. In addition, calls placed to the new area code using the old 314 area code would still be completed during the permissive dialing period. **A report is to be filed with the Commission no later than August 6, 1998.**

Number conservation issues: Parties in this case offered a number of methods for conserving number resources including 1,000s block number pooling, sequential number assignment and rate center consolidation. The Commission has determined that none of these methods are ready for immediate implementation. However, the Commission finds that “1000s block number pooling, sequential number assignment and rate center consolidation have significant potential for promoting the efficient utilization of numbering resources in the future and could dramatically prolong the lives of the NPAs (numbering plan areas---area codes) if implemented as soon as possible.”

As a result, the Commission has established a separate case for the purpose of addressing the above three methods of number conservation. Parties in this case are to file a sequential number assignment report within three months; a report on rate center consolidation within five months; and number pooling (1000s block number pooling) within seven months. Some of the technical changes that would be required to implement 1000s block number pooling are currently being discussed at the national level and national standards for implementation are being developed.

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